

# Green Doctor Pre-Payment Meter Advice

## What are PPMs?

A prepayment meter also known as a PPM or 'pay-as-you-go meter' can be a helpful and effective way to manage budgets and usage of gas or electricity. You top up credit to the meter BEFORE you use it, and energy usage is deducted from your meter in either pence or kWh. A prepayment meter will still pay standing charges.



Some households opt for a PPM if they have debt on the energy account/s to help manage paying it off whilst also using it to charge current energy usage. Suppliers must offer different ways for you to pay back debt, moving to a prepayment meter is only one option.

Your supplier can only install a prepayment meter to pay debt if it's safe and you can easily use and access it.

After the debt has been repaid suppliers must contact you and assess if a prepayment meter is still the most suitable and preferred payment method. If you decide to move from a prepayment meter, the supplier must agree where you pass any required credit checks.

*Did you know? You can switch suppliers if you have a prepayment meter and if you have debt of less than £500.*

## How can you top them up?



Traditional prepayment accounts are linked to a key, fob or card which can be topped up with credit, just like a mobile SIM card. You can top up at your local Payzone, PayPoint or Post Office outlet depending on your supplier.

A smart pay as you go (SPAYG) meter is very similar to a traditional prepayment meter but with the extra benefits of a smart meter.

You still need to top up before you use your energy. However, you'll have



access to an In Home Display (IHD) that tracks your usage and gives you alerts when your credit is running low. Plus, you can top up from home by doing so online or using an app, as well as by visiting your local top up point.



## Changes to PPM tariffs & prices from April 2024

The PPM cap level will be £47 lower compared to Direct Debit cap level. This is primarily based on the decision to introduce a levelisation allowance, which ensures prepayment customers pay the same level of standing charge compared to Direct Debit customers. This is to remove the 'premium' which PPMs had previously which saw the overall costs averaging higher than any other bill type in the past. This is because it costs energy suppliers more to get electricity and gas to those on a prepayment meter.

If you switch suppliers on any type of energy account, suppliers will have 5 days (instead of the 15 days in the past) to move you from your old energy supplier to your new one. If they do not meet the 5 day deadline they will have to pay £30 in compensation to you.



*Did you know? It is important to have access to your meter. If not, you can ask your supplier to move it. It is illegal to move a meter yourself. You may be charged for moving it, but it's free if you are registered with the Priority Services Register.*

## Know your rights with PPM installation



A supplier can installing a PPM without household permission but they must all follow rules set out by Ofgem since November 2023. Before a prepayment meter can be involuntarily installed, suppliers must:

- Make at least 10 attempts to contact a customer prior to installation
- Carry out a site welfare visit before a PPM is installed
- Refrain from all involuntary installations for the highest risk customers including households which require a continuous supply for health reasons and/or dependence on powered medical equipment.

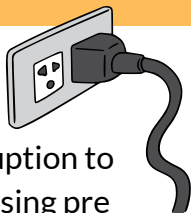
This covers households with an older occupant aged 75+ years, children aged under 2 years old, residents with severe health issues including terminal illnesses or those with a medical dependency on a warm home, and/or where there is no one present with the ability to top up the meter.

- Assess customers struggling to pay their energy bill where children under 5 years old live in the household, or people living in the household have serious medical or health conditions, serious mental or developmental health conditions, temporary situations, such as pregnancy or bereavement
- Audio or body cameras must be worn by the lead supplier representative present on all warrant installations or site welfare visits. All audio and footage will be available for audit
- Give a £30 credit per meter to remove the risk of customers going off supply at the point of PPM installation
- Re-assess the case once a customer has repaid debts owed



*A supplier can swap your meter by getting a warrant or by remotely switching your smart meter. They can only do this after they have taken all reasonable steps to agree payment with you. It should only be a last resort in order to avoid disconnecting your supply. A warrant can cost up to £150 and can be added onto existing debt. People who are in certain vulnerable situations will not have to pay this. A supplier must install a smart meter when fitting a prepayment meter. They will only install a traditional meter if there are technical reasons.*

## What is self-disconnecting?



'Self-disconnection' is defined as interruption to electricity or gas supply by consumers using pre payment meters because of a lack credit on the meter or account. This could be due to forgetting to top the meter up in time, not realising the meter was low on credit, and insufficient money available to top-up. The overall result is that the household is without gas or electricity until they can next top up.

You should contact your supplier straight away if you cannot afford to top up your meter. You can ask for:

- a review of your payments and debt repayments
- payment breaks or reductions
- more time to pay
- access to hardship funds
- Priority Service registration – a free support service if you are in a vulnerable situation



*Tell your energy supplier if you have a PPM and you can't easily get to a shop to add credit. If you live alone & have a health condition, have to travel a long way/long time, the journey is difficult or costly. Your supplier might agree to give you another way to top up your PPM; for example by text message, they could offer a smart meter in prepayment mode that you can top up online, or a credit meter that lets you pay bills monthly or quarterly.*

Suppliers who agreed to the Energy UK vulnerability commitment will never knowingly disconnect your household energy supply if you:

- have children under the age of six staying at any time of the year
- have children under the age of 16 staying during winter (1st October to 31st March)
- cannot safeguard your welfare or the welfare of other members in your household because of your age, health, disability or severe financial insecurity

